both working class whites and blacks.[111] Although control of the city's affairs was in the hands of Democratic elements, Republicans and blacks still constituted the majority of the city's population, forcing Democrats to accommodate their demands. During the 1870s and 1880s, black businessmen and entrepreneurs emerged who were financially secure and who rivaled many whites in wealth. They organized themselves into support organizations such as the Masons and Odd Fellows to combat legalized discrimination and latent threats to their security.[112]

The African American population of Wilmington prospered and by the 1880s had developed a complex society. Regular celebrations of Emancipation Day and Memorial Day were spectacles with parades and speeches by both blacks and whites.[113] Like other cultural groups in the city, African Americans developed literary societies, built libraries, established benevolent organizations to provide relief for the needy, and developed baseball leagues.[114] Along with creating new traditions, Wilmington blacks continued a few traditions developed under slavery, such as the Christmas Day Jonkonnus.[115]

Central to the development of black cultural and civic life in Wilmington was the church. Several churches in the city included black congregations before the Civil War however, after the war, most of the black congregations separated from the whites and established their own churches. Some of these new churches began with the assistance of outsiders from the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary

---

[111] In his description of Wilmington's history, local historian Andrew Howell explained that throughout Reconstruction businessmen "kept quiet" and prospered financially through all of the political upheaval. Howell also described the 1880's in Wilmington as a "decade of substance" through a series of physical improvements to the city's infrastructure, and increases in the business world. The cotton compress, as well as the naval stores and fertilizer industries benefited from increased profits. Howell, *Book of Wilmington,* 154, 162-172.

[112] The Odd Fellows boasted a high level of participation and, by the mid 1880's, they had constructed a large three story lodge, called Ruth Hall, at 401 South Seventh Street. The Masons, the oldest black fraternal organization in the U.S., had a lodge in Wilmington in 1866. Construction began in 1871 for a building for the Giblem Lodge at the corner of Princess and Eighth Streets. William Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950* (Wilmington: New Hanover County Public Library, 1998), 20-24.

[113] The first formal Emancipation Day celebration was held in 1868 and well-planned future celebrations followed. Commemorations moved from a central location in town to predominantly black communities. White speakers disappeared from the podium by the turn of the twentieth century. Memorial Day observances followed a similar pattern with the first Memorial Day parade in 1868. Other observances recalled Confederate evacuation of the city in 1865 and celebrated the visit of Frederick Douglass in 1872. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 3-6, 7-9.

[114] The Colored Literary Society was formed in 1870, the Benjamin Banneker Literary and Library Association was formed in 1883, the United Order of Tents (a women's benevolent society) was formed in 1875, and Love and Charity Benevolent Association was organized in 1878. As early as 1869, African American baseball teams were competing in the city and the tradition survived into the early twentieth century. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle,* 10-14, 39-43.

[115] A tradition filled with its African roots, Jonkonnus were celebrated in Wilmington well into the twentieth century by both blacks and whites. Dressed in bright, outrageous costumes, participants were known as kunners. Singing and dancing with drums and rattles, the kunners would move from street to street and seek donations for their performances. Exceptions to the annual celebration can be found in the record when laws created to restrict the movements of the Klan prohibited the parades and masks. For information on the changes to African American celebrations as a result of the 1898 violence, see Chapter 8. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle,* 34-37. For more on Jonkonnu, see Elizabeth A. Fenn, "A Perfect Equality Seemed to Reign, Slave Society and Jonkonnu," *North Carolina Historical Review,* April, 1988, 127-153.